



On Patrol

Volume 11 Number 3

News From the San Francisco Bay Area Freeway Service Patrol

September 2003

California FSP Scores a Hit at Western States Tow Show

by Sze Lei Leong, MTC SAFE

Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) programs from around California participated for the first time ever in the Western States Tow Show, held this year in Reno, Nev., and were welcomed warmly by attendees and exhibitors alike. The positive response showed us that the FSP's reputation as a highly effective weapon against congestion extends beyond our state's borders.

More than 2,000 tow operators, law enforcement officials, truck builders and suppliers, and other industry experts from 10 western states attended the annual event, which has been sponsored by the California Tow Truck Association (CTTA) for more than 30 years. Held June 12–15, 2003, this year's conference and trade show featured training seminars and discussions, and provided an opportunity for public agencies, support industries and commercial vendors to share information about the tow industry.

Three California FSP programs (Los Angeles, Orange County and the San Francisco Bay Area) and the California Highway Patrol (CHP) sent



representatives to the four-day event: Al Martinez, FSP project manager for the L.A. Metropolitan Transportation Authority; Iain Fairweather, motorist services program administrator for the Orange County Transportation Authority; Harvey Heaton, FSP liaison for the CHP; and Radiah Taylor Victor and I, FSP staff for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways.

FSP Spreads Its Message

The California FSP programs were invited by the CTTA to conduct a two-day seminar entitled "Benefits of

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the Freeway Service Patrol Program." The seminar was attended by a wide range of participants, all interested in learning about the FSP program and how to expand or start an FSP program in their own regions. While much of the discussion focused on variations in approaches toward clearing highway incidents, as well as on differences in tow industry hiring and training practices, there was one major point the attendees all agreed on — the FSP has brought significant benefits to the regions where it has been implemented. These benefits include not only congestion relief, but also extend to the tow industry itself, where the FSP has helped create jobs and improve work standards.

The California FSP programs further participated in the four-day event by staffing an information booth. This gave conference-goers an opportunity to find out more about the FSP and its benefits, as well as about the schedule of upcoming tow contract bidding around the state. It also gave FSP staff at the booth a sense for the tow industry's impressions of and opinions about the FSP program. Of those who stopped by the FSP booth, more than half knew or had heard about the program, and a majority of them expressed a favorable reaction to the FSP in their region.

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Quarterly Awards for January through June 2003

by Réka Goode,
MTC Public Information

BEATS OF THE QUARTER

Now that BART goes to San Francisco International Airport, maybe life will get a little less hectic for the Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) drivers on **Beat 6**.

Winner of the Beat of the Quarter award for the first quarter of 2003, Beat 6 covers the stretch of U.S. 101 that leads to the airport, and routinely logs the highest or next to highest number of assists of any of the 33 FSP beats in the Bay Area. Operated by **B & A Body Works and Towing** of San Francisco, the beat is patrolled by four FSP trucks and drivers, whose job it is to keep traffic moving between San Francisco and the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge.

B & A has been responsible for Beat 6 for more than four years, and has been with the FSP program since 1997, having previously covered two other Peninsula beats — Beats 11 and 20. Richard Bilafer, current owner of the more than 40-year-old business, commented that winning the Beat of

the Quarter award was likely based on two factors — the large number of incidents handled by B & A drivers (stemming from the high rate of traffic in the corridor), and the company's well-trained drivers. "Every one of the drivers assigned to Beat 6 has more than three years of experience," he noted. "Safety is our number one concern," he went on to say — which is one reason that the company has seen to it that 10 of its drivers are FSP-certified.

"The FSP is a great program for the public," Bilafer stated. "And it's not so bad for the contractors either," he quipped.

Those are sentiments that Leon Esquenazi, manager of **Campbell's Towing** of San Jose, would probably second. Campbell's has been with the FSP program since 1993, when the FSP first began serving the South Bay. It has been responsible for **Beat 10** — Beat of the Quarter for the second quarter of 2003 — for almost as long. "The FSP is a large portion of our business," Esquenazi said. "And we'll keep doing it for as long as the program wants us."

Esquenazi has been with Campbell's for nearly 20 years, since before Joe Scarff purchased the business in 1986. Like B & A, Campbell's has been in existence for more than 40 years.

In addition to Beat 10, Camp-

bell's operates four other FSP beats — the maximum number a single tow contractor is authorized to handle during one contract period. The company has a dedicated fleet of 12 FSP trucks and 14 FSP drivers, plus another five to seven drivers who are certified at any one time.

Running for a total of close to 20 miles — along U.S. 101 just south of Beat 6 and then south on State Route 85 to El Camino Real in Mountain View — Beat 10 is a very active beat, with bumper-to-bumper traffic, according to one of the beat's veteran drivers, Lee Holmes. "It keeps us very busy," he said. He described his fellow FSP drivers on Beat 10 as "excellent people, dedicated, straight-up."

Being an FSP driver is "a very rewarding job," Holmes declared. "We're like firemen: Our job is to make sure no one gets hurt — and plus, everybody likes you."

DRIVERS OF THE QUARTER

When **Robert Bettencourt Sr.** traded in his 23-year career in the painting business for driving a tow truck for Campbell's Towing a year and a half ago, little did he know that he would one day find himself out on the freeway helping a CHP officer round up a pig that had escaped from a truck.



Robert Bettencourt Sr.

While herding swine is not part of the job description for an FSP driver, keeping motorists safe by clearing the roadways of obstructions is. It's one of the things Bettencourt enjoys most, he said: "Helping the public and CHP officers stay safe." It's also one of the qualities that distinguishes an FSP driver from other tow truck drivers, he noted: "You have to be conscious of safety and everything around you."

The pig incident happened on the Peninsula when Bettencourt was patrolling Beat 10 (see story above). He also has driven Beat 31 in the South Bay, and currently is assigned to

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B & A's Glenn Castaneda, Bill Jauregui, Bennett Crawford and Rufino Sanchez (left to right) and William Flamenco (photo on facing page) patrol Beat 6 for the FSP.



Wolfe Cevorov, Dave Patel, Glen Sargent, Richard Anderson and Lee Holmes (left to right) of Campbell's Towing make up the Beat 10 FSP team.

Quarterly Awards

(continued from page 2)

Beat 23 on Interstate 680 between Milpitas and San Jose.

One of two drivers selected for the Driver of the Quarter award for the first quarter of 2003, Bettencourt wants to share the credit with others as well. "I wouldn't have this job if Joe Scarff [owner of Campbell's Towing] hadn't been willing to give me an opportunity," he declared. "I want to thank him and the mechanics who do a great job keeping the trucks on the road. And I have a great beat partner, someone I respect."

Larry Miller, the other driver selected for Driver of the Quarter for the first quarter of 2003, has been a tow truck driver for nine years, the same length of time he's been employed by Bryrich Towing of Concord. For almost half of that time, he's driven Beat 25 for the FSP. The second longest beat at nearly 24 miles, Beat 25 takes in portions of State Routes 4 and 242 in the Concord area.

Miller has had some close calls while patrolling the busy stretch of roadway. One rainy day when he had just stepped out of his truck to tag an abandoned vehicle, he suddenly heard the sound of skidding behind him. As he ran for the right shoulder, a pickup truck traveling too fast for the conditions rear-ended Miller's truck with such force that the FSP vehicle was pushed 40 feet despite its being in gear.

Big rigs that roar by at 65 to 75 miles per hour while Miller is changing a tire for a motorist also can get a little too close for comfort, he said, but, he declared, "I enjoy helping people. And people are pleased with the service, especially when they find out it's free. They often call us 'guardian angels.' The FSP is a great program."

William Flamenco, who was named Driver of the Quarter for the second quarter of 2003, is setting quite a track record. In 2000, he was

honored as Driver of the Month for the month of June. This year, in addition to earning the Driver of the Quarter award, he was part of the

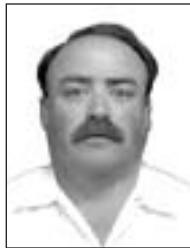
team that won the Beat of the Quarter honor for the first quarter of 2003 (see story on previous page).

A tow truck driver for about five years, he's been with B & A Body Works and Towing of San Francisco and the FSP for nearly four years. In that time he's driven backup for three different beats in widely scattered corners of the Bay Area — San Jose, Santa Rosa and Oakland — and now regularly patrols award-winning Beat 6 on the Peninsula.

Although he's seen his share of



William Flamenco



Larry Miller

serious accidents and unusual situations as an FSP driver, he noted that his most common tasks involve changing flat tires and providing a free gallon of gas. Motorists who take advantage of the latter service usually have an excuse like 'I was going to stop at the next exit to get gas,' but they are always happy to see Flamenco pull up in his truck, often exclaiming, 'You saved my life!' It is this kind of reaction that makes the job so satisfying for Flamenco. "People are grateful for the help," he said. "I enjoy rescuing people."

Tow Show

(continued from page 1)

Coordination a Plus

All six California FSP programs as well as the CHP helped provide content for both the seminar and the booth, even though only three of the programs were able to send representatives. Such cooperation is second nature to the California FSP, whose members regularly convene to keep abreast of issues and opportunities for the statewide program.

Every region of the state has its own unique situation, with factors such as budgetary constraints and diverse geography having an effect on how incidents are cleared. Collaboration among FSP programs provides an opportunity to learn from each other and to exchange and apply ideas that help to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the program statewide. Coordination also makes it possible to produce an annual statewide FSP report on standardization of data collection, as well as to implement a technological project to improve the flow of information about freeway incidents.

Efforts such as these — as well as participation in events like the Western States Tow Show — will continue to be a part of the FSP strategy to broaden the scope of the statewide program.

Upcoming Events

Technical Advisory Committee Meetings

8:30 a.m.

MTC MetroCenter

Tues., Sept. 9

Thurs., Nov. 13

CHP, Vallejo

Tues., Oct. 14

1999 Harrison St., 17th Floor

Tues., Dec. 9

Tow Contractors' Meetings

11 a.m.

MTC MetroCenter

Tues., Sept. 9

Thurs., Nov. 13

Quarterly Driver Refresher Training

11 a.m.–1 p.m.

CHP, Oakland

Dec. 18 & 19

CHP, Dublin

Dec. 11 & 12

Proficiency Testing

7 a.m.–4 p.m.

CHP, Vallejo

Mon., Oct. 6

Certification Classes

7 a.m.–4 p.m.


CHP, Vallejo


Oct. 22–24

The Public Speaks


Motorists continue to mail, e-mail and phone in praise and descriptions of their experiences with the FSP program. Here are a few recent comments.

Voicemail

 (4/24/03) "I used the Freeway Service Patrol on Monday, and I just wanted to advise you that the driver was wonderful. Let me tell you, he was great. I had just called AAA when your driver pulled over. He handed me a brochure and explained to me what the service was all about. He had such a great attitude. It was pouring down rain and he was out there fixing my tire for free! I tried to give him money for some coffee or something, but he wouldn't accept it. Thank you so much."

 (7/10/03) "I want to commend you for the service. I just had Mr. Smith pull over and help me. I had never heard of this service before. He offered to change my tire, and I took him up on his offer. He was very courteous and professional. He refused a tip that I offered. I was just completely blown away by the service. Mr. Smith deserves a big thank you from me for his professional work."

Letters

 (5/2/03) "On April 29, as I was on my way to work, I got a flat tire. When I pulled over and got out of my car, to my surprise there was a big white truck behind me. The driver got out of the truck, explained to me who he was and that he would change the tire and that the service was free."

I couldn't believe it! I tried to give him a tip and he wouldn't even take it. You know, it's bad enough just having a flat tire and then having to wait for someone to come change it. But to have someone just pop up out of nowhere was a wonderful surprise. I didn't know that this service was out there. Anyway, I just wanted to thank you and your driver, Kevin Mullette, for making me feel safer on my travels and for helping me. Keep up the good work."



E-mail

(5/20/03) "On the morning of [May] 16th my vehicle decided to stall in the third lane. In serious distress, I tried to pull to the side of the road. Joe McDonald very swiftly came to my aid and first made sure that I was emotionally okay, which was very reassuring. He made sure that I knew what he was going to do for me, and [gave me] the pamphlet, [which] was very informative. His first concern was my safety. A man who loves his job and is as comforting as he should be rewarded for his exceptional work in the field. Thank you."



(6/3/03) "This morning on my way to work, a road hazard caused me to get a flat tire. While I was calling, trying to find someone who could come out and fix the tire, a tow truck pulled up. [The driver] identified himself as Ronnie Gonzalez of the Freeway Service Patrol. Within 10 minutes I was back on the road at 'no charge.'

Mr. Gonzalez was pleasant, helpful and very efficient. I greatly appreciate the service and believe this program should continue and, if possible, it should be extended to cover a wider area. I am sure many people are stranded in situations where they could be seriously hurt or killed and this service could prevent that from happening."



(6/9/03) "This morning I called for assistance from a freeway call box. I wanted to thank you for the wonderful service I received. The operators who answered the call box call and the patrol driver who showed up were extremely courteous and kind, and the assistance was very quick."

I knew I was low on gas but didn't realize it was as low as it was. In any case, it is stressful to be stuck on a very busy freeway and being late to work, but having such wonderful people answer a call for help makes the situation not seem so bad."



(7/30/03) "Thank you for such a wonderful service. I had run out of gas [when I was out] on the freeway with my two small children. Before I could contact someone to come help me, Robert Betencourt came to my rescue. He was very courteous and very helpful. It is nice to know that there is such a service."

On Patrol is published periodically by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (MTC SAFE).

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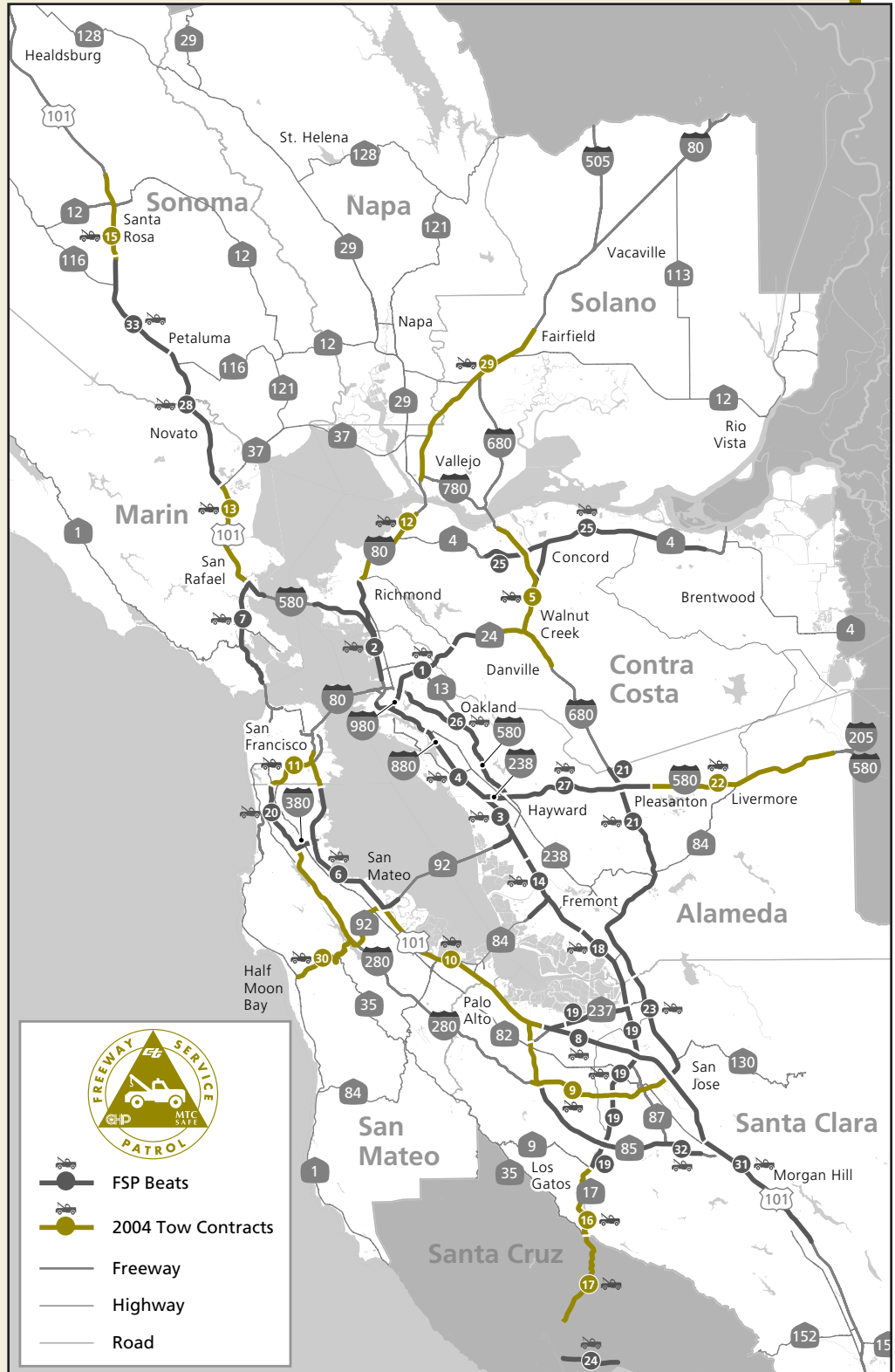


CALLING ALL BAY AREA TOW COMPANIES!
*THE BAY AREA FREEWAY SERVICE PATROL
2004 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)
WILL BE ISSUED THIS FALL*

- Join an elite team of Bay Area tow contractors.
 - Partner with the California Highway Patrol, Caltrans, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (MTC SAFE) and the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) SAFE.
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- **A total of 12 FSP beats will be up for re-bid.**
 - **Contracts will be awarded for three years.**
 - **RFP is expected to be issued in October 2003.**
 - **Proposers' conferences are tentatively scheduled for November 2003.**
 - **Proposals will be due in December 2003.**

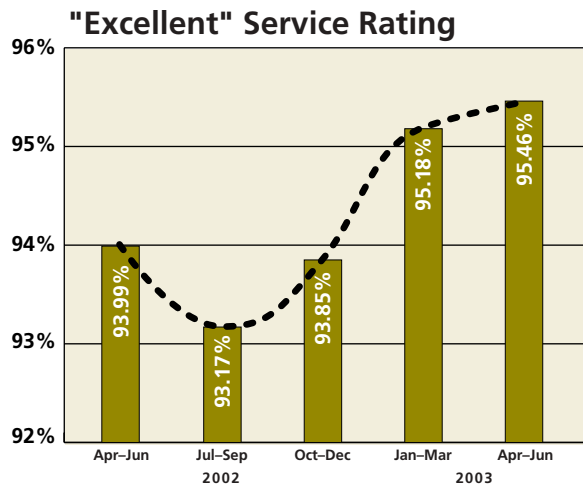
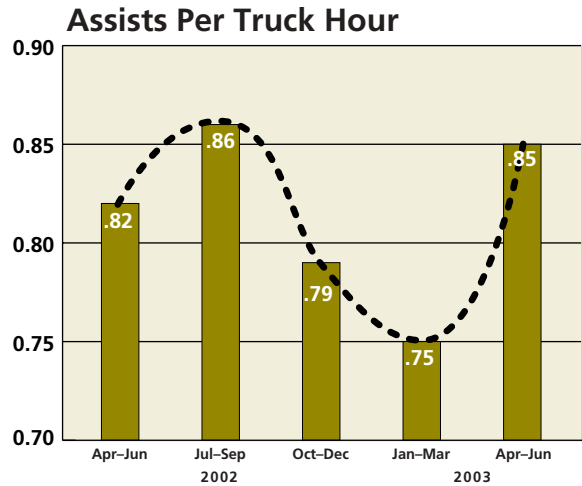
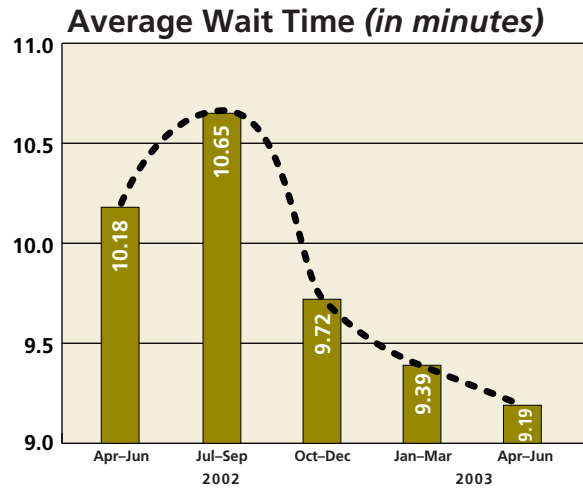
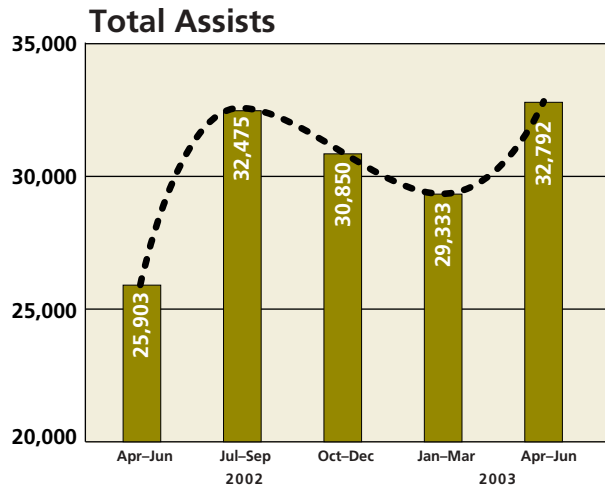
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Bay Area Freeway Service Patrol Statistics

April 2002 – June 2003



Incident Types (Jan.-June 2003)

